



In Harmony With the Seasons:

*Understanding Spring & the Liver Wood Element
within your body*



By Maddison Crothers

Spring signifies rebirth, a new beginning as we begin the slow and gentle unfurling towards the Yang of Summer. The energy of the Wood element wants to rise up with the sun, celebrating the longer days, and the renewal of energy and creativity that has been cultivating within the depths of Winter.

An expression of life at its most fertile, this energy brings life to our own visions, providing the motivation and inspiration to bring these dreams to fruition.

Teaching us the wisdom of flexibility and adaptability, **Spring is a time of sudden growth and rapid expansion.** During this transition from the Yin into the Yang, there is a sense of shedding as we initiate the process of release and rebirth, stepping out of the watery depths of Winter, feeling rested and replenished, ready for a new cycle.

The Spring season is associated with the Liver/Gallbladder meridian system, and together these two organs ensure that there is a smooth flow of Qi and Blood throughout the body, which in turn has a regulating effect on the emotions.

We invite you to welcome in a season of creative potential, of expansion, growth and renewal. *Feel the gentle lifting energy of Spring, for the seeds you sowed over Autumn and Winter can now begin to sprout and flourish in alignment with that of the natural world around you.* It is through the constant observance and mirroring of nature, her cycles and seasons, that we are able to feel into our most aligned and vibrant selves.





ELEMENT: *Wood*

YIN ORGAN: *Liver*

YANG ORGAN: *Gallbladder*

EMOTION: *Anger*

SPIRIT: *Hun*

CLIMATE: *Wind*

COLOUR: *Green*

TASTE: *Sour*

SENSE ORGANS: *Eyes*

TISSUES: *Tendons*

VIRTUES: *patience, forgiveness & benevolence*



“The supernatural forces of spring create wind in heaven and wood upon the earth. Within the body they create the liver and the tendons; they create the green colour, and give the voice the ability to make a shouting sound, they create the eyes, the sour flavour, and the emotion of anger.”

- *The Inner Classic*



The Wood Element


Considered the first of the five elements, the Wood element is new Yang, *the beginning of a new cycle*.

The Wood element represents everything that grows and expands, it is flexible, yielding, strong and durable.

Just as we would imagine a tree, the Wood element covers and penetrates the earth, expanding from its centre and expressing itself in an outward and upward direction.

We embody the Water element to conceive new ideas, and then utilising the Wood element, are able develop and actualise them, creating plans and strategies that help us to bring these ideas into reality with a motivated and decisive force. When in balance, the Wood element allows us to be focused, driven, brave and decisive. However, when in a state of disharmony, we can begin to feel angry, frustrated and controlling, feeling a lack of direction and purpose in life.





“Wood is new Yang, the first stage of a new cycle. It is an aggressive, vigorous energy that bursts forth from the depths of substance, expanding, invigorating all in its field of influence, bringing forth creation and life. *The Wood element initiates activity. It is the creative urge and the procreative drive. It is the “will to become”, the urge to grow and develop, to create our own existence.* It is that which provokes and drives. We experience it as the urge to express ourselves, to manifest, to break bonds, to metamorphose.”

- Ron Teegarden

The Liver & Gallbladder

Chinese medicine follows cyclical patterns, both physically, and in accordance with the natural world. The Body-Energy Clock is therefore built upon the concept of the cyclical ebb and flow of energy/Qi throughout the body. During a 24-hour period, Qi moves in two-hour intervals through each of the organ systems within the body. Qi flows through the Gallbladder from 11pm-1am and the Liver from 1am-3am. **Resting your body in a deep state of sleep during this timeframe, allows these organ systems to regenerate and strengthen.**

In Classical Chinese and Taoist medicine, the Liver

- Stores and purifies Blood
- Regulates the smooth flow of Qi throughout the body
- Controls the peripheral nervous system
- Regulates muscle tension
- Opens into the eyes and controls vision
- Nourishes the tendons and ligaments
- Nourishes the nails
- Manifests as creativity, ambition and motivation
- Promotes digestion and absorption
- Supports reproductive function
- Houses the Ethereal Soul (Hun)



The Gallbladder is the Yang organ to the Liver's Yin and is responsible for the storing and excretion of bile that has been produced in the Liver. The Gallbladder also works to distribute Qi through the Liver and into the body, so when we introduce any form of Taoist practice, whether that be tonic herbalism, Qigong, Yoga or any form of movement that affects the body in a deep and meaningful way, it is the Liver/Gallbladder that processes these emotions and toxins. **If there is any disharmony present within this organ system pair, or the toxic load is greater than the function, a 'bottleneck' effect can occur, manifesting as pent up energy and emotion.** This is why we use Liver herbs such as Schisandra, allowing this organ system to flow with more ease, and any pent up energetic load to be processed and released

**If you feel your physical or tonic herbal practice is bringing up too much too soon, we recommend working with a TCM practitioner who can provide an individualised treatment, working to bring the smooth flow of Qi through the Liver/Gallbladder system.*



Liver Wood is Associated *with the Emotion of Anger*

Every organ corresponds to the energy of a certain emotion. As a fundamental concept in Chinese medicine, it is perceived that a physical disorder (*linked to a certain organ*) can originally stem from an imbalance in the emotion associated with that organ. The reverse of this can also be true, that an imbalance in an organ may heighten or exacerbate the associated emotion, and can be a vicious cycle. **Anger is the natural response to any interruption in the Liver's mission to move and expand, and on the other hand, an excess of anger that is current or repressed can impact the functioning of the Liver.** As with all emotions, they provide a window into our inner landscape, bringing attention to what is out of balance. Driving us forward, anger can help us to change and grow, to assert our needs and stand up for ourselves. *When faced with conflict, a harmonious Liver allows us to process and integrate, to set healthy boundaries and stand firm in our conviction.*



Hun - *The Ethereal Soul*

The Ethereal Soul; the Hun shares similarities with the Western concept of the soul.

Entering the body 3 days after birth, it has a will of its own, inhabiting the formless realm of imagination and dreams, *it brings animation to our mental processing.*

It is said to be a *'free flowing shapeshifter, existing amongst the clouds of heaven'*. Upon death, it leaves the body, and in its wandering spirit, travels back to the heavenly realms.

The Hun weaves its magic into our sleep and dreams, cultivating a deep state of rest with dreams that benefit the soul. Bringing balance to our emotional landscape, the Hun ensures that the emotions are neither repressed or over expressed. *It is also responsible for our decision making and planning, directing us towards our own vision and purpose in life.*

The Hun is happiest when the Liver is healthy, and the Blood and Liver Qi is abundant and able to flow smoothly. This contentment cultivates a healthy flow of creativity and

imagination, a connection to one's intuition and ability to envision their goals and life purpose, that sense of direction we all crave. When the Hun is balanced, we can be adaptive and flexible to life's challenges, feeling motivated and courageous enough to actualise our dreams.

If the Liver is in a weakened state, as in the case of Liver Qi stagnation, or a Blood/Yin deficiency, the Hun is not able to flow freely.

One may lack motivation, direction and purpose in life, losing touch with their imagination and creativity, they may begin to feel disconnected to their dreams and vision for life. This feeling can cause a person to feel stuck and unable to move forward or regulate their emotions.

In the case of an overburdened Liver, the Hun can become flighty and cause havoc in the mind, causing one to feel emotionally overwhelmed, frustrated and ungrounded. *This individual may be full of creative ideas but unable to execute them.*

Lifestyle Practices *for Spring*

Just as the Wood element begins to extend its energy upwards and outwards within the plant kingdom during Spring, we too can nourish and support this energetic shift within ourselves.

As a time of renewal, growth, envisioning and outward expression, we want to take advantage of this new burst of life and begin to gently and slowly move out of the darker, more Yin months of the year and begin our ascension into the Yang. *These are some of our favourite practices to transition into Spring, and embrace the transformative energy this special season has to offer, as it accumulates in the Liver/Gallbladder system.*

- **Journaling**, mind mapping and manifestation work
- **Meditation**
- **Move stuck energy with physical movement** - *go for walks, stretch, practice yoga or any form of exercise that feels most aligned with your needs*
- Get outside and spend time in nature
- Wind occurs in every season but is most potent during Spring, which is also when the Liver is most vulnerable and the meridians along the neck and shoulders can be most affected by 'invading wind'. **Do your best to keep your neck and shoulders covered on windy days.**
- **Get to sleep before 11pm** (the beginning of Liver/Gallbladder time on the Taoist Organ Clock)
- **Declutter and reset your space** - *go through your home and throw out or donate what no longer serves you, making space for the new.* Reducing physical clutter creates space in the mind, freeing it up to create.
- **Practice forgiveness**, process and let go of any resentment or frustration that may be draining your Liver Qi
- Begin a consistent **dry body brushing and/or Gua Sha** practice
- **Stay hydrated** with filtered or spring water, making sure you are supporting the body's detoxification pathways and nourishing yourself on a cellular level, *for extra points add in freshly squeezed lemon juice and some tonic herbs.*
- Get some form of **bodywork**, *whether that be acupuncture, cupping or lymphatic drainage/remedial/relaxation massages etc.*



Eating Habits for Spring

The season to nourish the Liver and Gallbladder, we are focusing on 'cleansing' this organ system as we move from the storing and descending energy of Winter, and begin to emphasise the Yang ascending and expansive qualities of Spring and focus on seasonally appropriate foods that keep us grounded and healthy as we transition into this new season. The eating suggestions below are intended to nourish the Liver and Gallbladder, promote and assist the movement of Qi in an upwards and outwards direction and support digestion, immunity and general wellness.

**We want to emphasise the importance of gently transitioning through the seasons, so these recommendations can be slowly integrated into your daily routine, whilst still focusing on grounding, nourishing and easily digestible meals that keep you feeling healthy and resilient as the weather continues to shift during early Spring.*

EAT MORE GREEN

Liver Wood and Spring are associated with the colour green, so start incorporating more green foods into your diet. Any fruit or vegetable that is green and that you enjoy is a perfect place to start. **Foods that are green in colour are rich in chlorophyll, and support Liver function.** If you want to take it one step further, including Spirulina, Chlorella or Wheatgrass powders are also very nourishing during this time.

INCORPORATE BITTER, SWEET AND PUNGENT FOODS

In Traditional Chinese medicine theory, the five flavours of foods each have their own characteristics and functions for health, and correlate with specific organ systems. Integrating more bitter foods into your diet can have a harmonising and supportive effect on the Liver and Gallbladder.

Bitter foods can include arugula (rocket), dandelion (root and greens), radish, quinoa, citrus peel and asparagus.

Although the 'sweet' flavour is not directly associated with the Liver, it can have a supportive effect by enhancing Qi, nourishing and tonifying the organs, and regulating the function of the Stomach and Spleen. It is recommended to incorporate sweet foods to stay in harmony with the growing conditions of natural Qi. **Sweet tasting foods include honey, sweet fruits, sweet vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes, and sweet grains such as corn, rice and millet.**

Pungent foods can aid perspiration and promote the upward and outward movement of Qi. **Pungent foods include fennel, rosemary, caraway seeds, dill, bay leaf, onion, garlic, ginger, radish, daikon, leek and chives.**

INCORPORATE SOUR FOODS, BUT NOT TOO MUCH

Sour foods in small amounts can strengthen the Liver, they are cooling and Yin in nature. Having a contracting, astringent and firming effect, they can help to strengthen tendons, ligaments, improve bladder control and regular perspiration. A small amount of sour can strengthen the Liver, whilst

overconsumption can cause Qi stagnation and lead to an imbalance within that organ system. **Sour foods can include lemons, limes, pickled vegetables and vinegar.**

BEGIN TO SHIFT YOUR COOKING METHODS

During Winter we focus on slow cooking, however as we transition into Spring we look to change up our cooking methods by using higher cooking temperatures and shorter cooking times, which ensures that foods are not as thoroughly cooked. Through the Chinese medicine lens, too much raw food is can be damaging to the Spleen and Stomach, so whilst it is great to begin incorporating more fresh foods into your diet as the weather warms up, shifting your cooking methods is another great way to ensure you are not putting too much strain on your digestive fire and these incredibly important organ systems. **When cooking with water, light boiling or steaming is recommended, and if cooking with oil, it is advised to use a quick high temperature sauté method.**

EXTRA TIPS

- Avoid heavy/fatty foods which can burden the Liver/Gallbladder. *These can include processed dairy, fried foods, poorly sourced meats and large quantities of nuts.*
- Limit your alcohol and refined sugar intake
- Stay hydrated - *drink warm water first thing in the morning and throughout the day*
- Eat slowly and mindfully
- Go for a gentle walk after eating to support digestion



Shopping List

These are some of the foods that energetically align with the season of Spring, nourish Liver Wood and nourish the body in the transition from the Yin to Yang.

It's important to note that this is a general guide, and understanding your own dietary needs and constitution should also be considered, but the beauty is in the exploration of new foods and how they may nourish you.

VEGETABLES

Asparagus
Broccoli
Cabbage
Celery
Avocado
Kale
Leek
Lettuce
Dandelion greens
Peas
Sorrel
Spinach
Radish
Zucchini
Artichokes

BEETS

Beets
Carrots
Garlic
Onion
Parsnip
Sweet potato

FRUIT

Apples
Grapefruit
Kiwifruit
Lemon or lime,
Peaches
Plum
Pomegranate
Strawberries

GRAINS

Quinoa
Amaranth
Brown rice
Buckwheat
Millet

PROTEIN

Oily fish
Yoghurt
Free-range eggs
Chicken
White fish

NUTS & SEEDS

Cashews
Brazil nuts
Sunflower seeds

LEGUMES

Split peas
Lima beans
Lentils
Mung beans
Adzuki beans

HEALTHY FATS

Butter
Olive oil
Sesame oil

SPICES

Sage
Turmeric
Peppermint
Parsley
Ginger

FENNEL

Dill
Basil
Caraway
Saffron
Rosemary

THYME

Cumin
Cardamom

FERMENTED FOODS

Green olives
Sauerkraut
Apple cider vinegar
Miso
Tempeh
Kvass
Natto
Kimchi

TEA

Milk Thistle
Dandelion Root
Nettle
Peppermint



TONIC HERBS

We love to work with many of the herbs from our range during seasonal shifts and especially to create strong foundations as we venture into the Wood and Fire elements of the year.

As we turn our focus to the Liver/Gallbladder system throughout Spring, the herbs that will nourish and hold you through this season are:



SCHIZANDRA

- Enters and tonifies all 5 of the major organ systems
- Enhances beauty and radiance
- Supports detoxification
- Supports a healthy stress response
- Improves energy and vitality
- Supports reproductive health
- Nourishes Yin Jing, Shen, Blood and Qi



BEAUTY BLEND

- Supports detoxification
- Cultivates a glowing complexion and radiant skin
- Nourishes the hair and nails
- Supports skin elasticity
- Supports hormonal health and reproductive function
- Enhances longevity and vitality
- Nourishes Yin Jing and Qi



QI

- Supports the smooth flow of Qi throughout the body
- Improves energy and vitality
- Supports digestive health
- Supports respiratory function and Lung health
- Improves immune function



TONIC HERBS



We also love to incorporate Reishi, Eucommia Bark and I Am Gaia during Spring, all of which nourish and support Liver Wood during Spring.

MSM

- Supports Liver Wood
- Nourishes the hair, skin and nails
- Supports detoxification
- Supports the health of the joints and bones



Learn More

We wanted to make this PDF a digestible, but comprehensive resource that you are able to return to every year for inspiration and support. In saying that, we would love to share more resources if you wish to dive deeper into the Taoist/Chinese medicine approach to Spring.

SUPERFEAST PODCAST EPISODES

[How to Eat in Spring with Kimberly Ashton](#)

[Spring: The Season of Liver Wood with Mason and Tahnee Taylor](#)

[Schisandra: The Magical Berry with Mason and Tahnee from SuperFeast](#)

[Kid's Immunity and Liver Flushing with Helen Paradin](#)

SUPERFEAST IG VIDEOS

[Is Your Liver Frustrated and Angry?](#)

[Don't Forget Spring](#)

[Must Have Herbs for Spring](#)

[How to Get Grounded When Seasons Pivot](#)

SUPERFEAST ARTICLES

[Detoxification Guide - A Look At The Body's Detoxification Channels](#)

[100 Days of Schisandra - Shine From the Inside Out](#)

[The Beautifying Schisandra Detox Lemonade](#)

BOOKS

Here are some of our favourite books to read when we want to dive a little deeper into Tonic Herbalism, with a special focus on each organ, its corresponding element and their alignment with each season.

- **Healing with Whole Foods** by Paul Pitchford
- **The Ancient Wisdom of the Chinese Tonic Herbs** by Ron Teeguarden
- **Chinese Medicine: The Web That Has No Weaver** by Ted J. Kaptchuk
- **Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine** by Harriet Beinfield & Efreim Korngold
- **Power of the Five Elements: The chinese Medicine Path to Healthy Ageing and Stress Resistance** by Charles A. Moss



